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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [RU](#) [BE](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: A/S FRIED DISCUSSES NATO AND FORMER SOVIET SPACE  
ISSUES WITH FRENCH OFFICIALS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CRAIG STAPLETON, FOR REASONS 1.4 B/D

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 31, A/S Fried met with French MFA officials to discuss NATO partnerships, Georgia, Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, Belarus, Russia and Darfur. Fried pressed French officials to remain open to offering Georgia a NATO Membership Action Plan, and noted that French and U.S. analyses regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, Ukraine and Belarus were very similar, with both sides agreeing on the opportunity to pursue a solution on Nagorno-Karabakh. The atmosphere was positive. The French side enthusiastically took the opportunity to compare analyses, which largely tracked with those of the USG, with two major exceptions: Russia and NATO. Regarding Russia, Political Director Stanislas de Laboulaye cautioned against "returning to Cold War blocs," code for policies in the former Soviet space that might offend Russia, particularly on Georgia. In an extended discussion of NATO partnerships, French officials laid down clear reservations about a broader, "global" role for NATO in conjunction with other democracies. They presented a constricted view of NATO's continuing role in Darfur, and stated that France would not be able to make a national contribution. Finally, EU member states, according to the French, favor an EU-wide approach to energy security. End summary.

¶2. (U) A/S Fried, Pol M/C and Poloff met first with A/S-equivalent for Strategic Affairs Philippe Carre, followed by a separate meeting with A/S-equivalent for Russia, the former Soviet space and the Balkans Jean-Francois Terral. In a third, and last, meeting, A/S Fried, the Ambassador, POL M/C, Deputy Polcouns and Poloff met with Political Director Stanislas de Laboulaye, Carre, Terral, Minsk Group co-chair Ambassador Fassier, and EU CFSP Unit Head Vincent Falconi.

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NATO  
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¶3. (C) Much of the discussion centered on partnerships, which was prompted by the March 31 tabling at NATO of the U.S.-UK food-for-thought paper on Global Partnership. Carre emphasized a distinction between members and non-members, and between "within the family" discussions in the NAC and arrangements for dialogue and cooperation with partners, including new high-end partners. He agreed that NATO must first discuss strategic challenges and appropriate responses "en famille." Partners come in at the implementation stage, with those who have something to contribute joining discussions of appropriate taskings and arrangements.

¶4. (C) NATO is cohesive, Carre contended, because it is built on a shared history around Article 5. If non-NATO members are given the privileges afforded to NATO members, he argued, the alliance would be "watered down," and if membership were extended to non-traditional countries, the bond shared among

members would become "looser." Carre repeatedly warned of using NATO in such a way as to move it from a military alliance dealing with common threats to a Western alliance projecting into non-Western cultures. He argued that NATO must avoid feeding the counter-productive perception held by some that it is a "military part of the American bloc," particularly as China rises to the "number two position" in global power. Fried countered that the partnership initiative did not blur the distinction between partners and members. Chinese misinterpretations could be avoided through dialogue and outreach, and an offer of partnership to India, a non-Western democracy, would address some of Carre's "West versus the Rest" objection. He cited Carre's example of Chinese misgivings potentially necessitating the establishment of a channel of communication between China and NATO.

15. (C) Fried replied that NATO benefited from the input of partners like Afghanistan but also from the input of high-end security providers such as Australia, Japan and South Korea. NATO, he said, only stood to gain by advancing its cooperation with partners. Carre agreed that NATO should be able, in addressing a problem, to reach out to and work with, any country that is prepared and able to help. He also affirmed that there needs to be a place to discuss potential operations. However, he explained, the GoF did not want to see NATO become "a permanent grouping of like-minded democracies," and he saw no place in NATO for non-members to determine future missions or discuss "global common challenges" in general (Strategic Dialogue). Carre mentioned the Contributors Committee as a forum that already exists for partners to coordinate, but admitted that NATO could use another forum for potential contributors to interface with NATO when they are considering joining a NATO operation. Fried said that NATO operations often take place under

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circumstances that require NATO to look beyond the tactical and even strategic goals of the mission itself. For example, he said, the ISAF mission in Afghanistan opened wider questions about the role of Pakistan and other bordering nations. NATO partners who are engaged in Afghanistan, he argued, should have a say in answering these relevant questions. Carre accepted the point, but stressed that such consultation be operation-specific.

16. (C) Turning to upcoming NATO meetings, Carre called for differential treatment in terms of expectations for the Sofia ministerial and the Riga summit. He asked that the U.S. not trumpet in Sofia elements that it would like to see announced eventually in Riga. Carre conceded that broad objectives would undoubtedly be addressed in Sofia and that language such as "provide security wherever needed" or "the need to cooperate" would be mentioned, but he stressed that they should not be broadcast as defining statements lest they precipitate division.

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DARFUR  
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17. (C) Citing President Chirac's previous discussion with President Bush, Carre said France supported the AU and the UN, and that some NATO assistance was acceptable. However, this should be limited to support, i.e., no troops on the ground or raising the flag, no role in an operational sense, or simply to "score points." Fried said that NATO was being asked to do more because of the needs on the ground. Effectiveness is the key. Carre responded that France would be unable to assist, given its other commitments, e.g., in the DRC. Fried cautioned that it would be important for France to make some contribution, if only to avoid the perception of another Iraq. Carre averred that while France would not make a contribution, it would also not seek to keep French officials from participating in a NATO operation: "This is not Iraq." Carre said NATO contributions were not

of much value unless the U.S. was involved. He noted that when the AU was supported by NATO, the U.S. provided transport under a NATO label. He said a NATO role was an "abstraction" because, other than planning, it consisted of national contributions.

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GEORGIA  
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¶18. (C) Fried said it was important to see Georgia as it was, with good and bad, and not simply to accept Russia's simplistically negative view. Terral agreed and said France rejects Russian "propaganda." Indeed, they are well aware of Russia's bad behavior in this region. Terral said he noticed the positive effect of U.S. guidance on Georgian President Saakashvili, but noted that every time Saakashvili makes a mistake, Russia takes advantage of it. France is focused on reversing Russia's roll-back strategy, which seeks to maintain and strengthen Moscow's grip on its neighbors. Terral said he didn't understand why Georgia wasn't moving faster on implementation of the military bases agreement.

¶19. (C) Fried outlined reasons why Georgia could be a good candidate for a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), notably the support for NATO membership among the Georgian population, as opposed to the more divided Ukrainian population. Terral, Carre and Laboulaye stressed Russian opposition, with Laboulaye underscoring France's desire not to return to the Soviet-era 'bloc' mentality. Carre said France viewed giving a MAP to Georgia as similar to EU accession negotiations, i.e., an inevitable road to membership. Fried disagreed: membership was conditional on performance and MAP was expressed as a statement of hopes, not inevitability. He added that MAP would make Georgia a stabilizer in the region and argued that Russian objections were manageable, just as they had been for the Baltic states and Central Europe.

¶10. (C) Falconi reviewed the EU action plan toward Georgia and focused on the EU's demand for progress on frozen conflicts in addition to progress in implementing reforms. Fried agreed that reform was important, as was constructive Georgian behavior with respect to the regional conflicts, but added that Georgia should not be held responsible for Russian obstructionism, e.g., on Abkhazia, as this gave too much leverage to Russia. He argued that Georgia needs incentives, not just U.S. pressure, which the MAP process could provide.

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UKRAINE

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¶11. (C) Fried noted public U.S. statements that the international community will work with whatever government emerges from the Ukrainian elections, while privately encouraging the divided Orange coalition to re-unite. Terral agreed with this approach and said that former PM Tymoshenko and President Yushchenko should join together. He noted, however, that personality differences may make it impossible for them to do so.

¶12. (C) Terral emphasized that businessman and Regions leader Rinat Akhmetov appears to be moving into the forefront of Regions leadership at the expense of former PM Yanukovich. Saying he bears watching, Terral described Akhmetov as smart, pragmatic, and not exclusively Moscow-oriented. Terral thought an Akhmetov-led Regions party could eventually evolve in the right direction. Fried agreed, but emphasized that Akhmetov's evolution was still a work in progress, and an Orange coalition was the best short-term answer for Ukraine. Terral reiterated it was important for the West to open a dialogue with the Regions party. Fried agreed.

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BELARUS  
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¶13. (C) Terral said there is a new dynamic in Belarus; for the first time, the opposition is credible and united. He stressed the need to promote and help opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich in a subtle way, so as to make sure he is not expelled or imprisoned. Milinkevich, said Terral, had the right approach; he wanted to become a viable candidate for the next elections, not last week's. Terral said it was possible, perhaps, to encourage Moscow to think favorably of Milinkevich, given that he is pragmatic and not anti-Russian.

France supports inviting him to meet with the EU, OSCE and even NATO, but would be against his visiting capitals such as Prague, Vilnius and Warsaw, because this would make him appear as a pro-West puppet, and therefore diminish his credibility with Moscow.

¶14. (C) Fried agreed with Terral's points, but noted that Russia should not be given the right to determine what countries Milinkevich should visit, and which he should not. Fried also raised the situation of students involved in the recent demonstrations in Minsk and now in danger of expulsion from their schools. The EU and the U.S. should think creatively about how to help these students, said Fried, to show that the West has not forgotten them.

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NAGORNO-KARABAKH  
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¶15. (C) Fried argued that the possibility of progress toward a settlement, thought to be dead in the water at Rambouillet, has been resuscitated. Laboulaye asked if Russia could be trusted to play a positive role. Fried said he thought Russia was in a constructive mode on Nagorno-Karabakh, if only to keep the U.S. from moving unilaterally. Minsk co-chair Amb. Fassier wondered whether Azerbaijani President Aliyev was ready to deal, given his public hard-line and references to a military option. He also questioned whether Armenian President Kocharian was more concerned about succession and whether Russian participation in a PKF would be more like Abkhazia or SFOR. Fried agreed that there were many uncertainties in the process, but concluded that there was nonetheless a chance of success. After some reflection, Laboulaye agreed it was worth another try. Fassier expressed hope for an agreement on principles by the St. Petersburg summit and noted that the issue would be discussed during an upcoming April 19 meeting in Russia. Carre suggested postponing discussions on a PKF, given that the OSCE's HLPG was not ready. He suggested another body would need to do planning unless a "real" HLPG were created.

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RUSSIA  
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¶16. (C) Laboulaye noted that Russia was "in the background" of many of the issues discussed, and had furthermore been the subject of much discussion during the previous day's meeting between President Chirac and the Secretary. Laboulaye agreed with Fried that Russia cannot be allowed to determine our policy toward countries in the region. In his longest intervention, he underscored, however, that there was also another logic of relations with Russia, especially for Europeans. A good relationship with Russia was central to

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French thinking, and France wants to avoid the (re)creation of blocs. French thinking on MAP, Georgia and Ukraine should be seen in this light. Fried replied that good relations with Russia are an important goal worth pursuing, even in the face of current difficulties, but it would be a mistake to cater to Russia's irrational emotions. Georgia should be allowed to make its own case, and not have it defined by

Russia.

¶17. (C) Regarding energy security, Falconi said that national policies on energy were beginning to evolve in an EU direction as a result of Russia's pressure on Ukraine. Laboulaye underscored the harm Russia had done to its international credibility as an energy supplier because of its recent heavy-handedness in dealing with Ukraine and Moldova. Fried said the U.S. was prepared to discuss energy issues with the EU and/or individual member states as appropriate, but needs advice on who will be the appropriate interlocutor. In addition, Fried warned that Russian domination of Georgia could have a potentially negative impact on European and U.S. energy security.

¶18. (U) A/S Fried has cleared this message.  
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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Stapleton